# The little Passion.

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PASSIO CHRISTI.

Die kleine Passion.

# THE LITTLE PASSION

OF

# Albert Durer

REPRODUCED IN FAC-SIMILE.

EDITED BY

W. C. PRIME.

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J. W. BOUTON, 416 BROOME STREET.
1868.

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# THE LITTLE PASSION.

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ALBERTVS · DVRERES · NORICVS · INTER · PIC
TORES · OMNIVM · ÆTATVM · FACILE · PRINCEPS · 1577

N presenting this volume to the American public I have had a double object. The series of illustrations is not unfamiliar to European eyes, since various editions, copies and reproductions have been published on the continent and in England. But it may be safely said, that the wood-cuts of Albert Durer are almost unknown to Americans. There cannot be, in this country, more than two or three complete sets of the thirty-seven illustrations known as the Little

Passion. Few, indeed, are to be found anywhere. The first object then may challenge criticism. It is simply to place in the hands of Americans, whether lovers of art or those seeking information, the works of a great master, works of exceeding force and beauty, full of suggestion, full of passionate devotion. In all the history of illustration there is no such series as this, no collection by any one artist more worthy of study, more rich in wonderful thought.

The second object of this publication is somewhat different. A great improvement in the art of illustration is an object of interest to all lovers of the beautiful. There is no more fitting method of introducing it to them than by dedicating it to the reproduction of the works of a great master, and especially of a master who may be rightly regarded as the originator of almost all that is beautiful in wood engraving.

From time to time during the past ten years processes have been introduced to the world whose object is the reproduction of drawings, engravings

and other illustrations. That which is used in the present volume is one of the latest, and its success is visible to the eyes of the reader. Had it been known in the time of Albert Durer he would not have needed to employ the wood engraver for the purpose of multiplying impressions of his noble drawings. The process of making them would have been more simple and rapid. The drawing would have been photographed in a few minutes, and the photograph, being taken in transfer ink, would in a few minutes more have been impressed on stone, from which stone, by the ordinary lithographic press, the work would have been printed to any desired extent. Durer is not living to increase the number of his works, but there is no longer any reason why the vastly multiplied population of lovers of art should not be supplied with fac-simile copies of those works which are extant. The process which is used in this volume furnishes an exact copy of the original, without changing a line or shade. The defects which are visible here and there are defects in the original plates, accurately copied

by this process. In short, this edition is "from the original impressions" by the newly discovered art of transferring with the aid of light. It is not improbable that the present issue will be followed by other reproductions of works of the early masters.

Having thus stated the objects of the publication, it remains only to give a brief history of the Artist, his art, and his work now republished.

ORE than four centuries have passed since the readers of books in Europe first saw them illustrated with engravings. The invention of printing with moveable type sprang from the previously existing art of engraving on wood. Whether Guttenberg in Strasburg and Mayence, or Koster in Harlem, be rightfully honored as the inventor of the great art, there is no dispute that for a long time previous to their first work there had been wood engravers, and more or less books had been printed and published, the pages being impressed from

engraved blocks of wood. It does not concern our present purpose to enumerate the block-books, of which copies or fragments are extant, nor to discuss the dates of their several productions. Not only books had been thus published. It is evident that prints were issued separately, and that in the early part of the fifteenth if not in the fourteenth century, the people of Europe were somewhat familiar with wood-cuts. The dates may be stated in general as follows: In or soon after the year 1400, wood engraving was known in Germany, and block-books were published, the illustrations and text being engraved on the same block. About the middle of the fifteenth century printing with moveable and metallic types began to be practised. A few years later wood-cuts were used for the illustration of books which were printed with moveable type.

The earliest known wood-cut which bears a date is a large, rude, but forcible representation of St. Christopher, bearing the child Christ across the stream. This cut is eleven and a quarter inches high, by eight and an eighth inches in width. It is dated 1423.

The earliest book, printed from moveable type and illustrated with wood-cuts, is a book of Fables, printed by Pfister, at Bamberg, in 1461. It should be remarked however, that ornamental initial letters, engraved on wood blocks, were used at an earlier date.

The first printing was intended to be and was a close imitation of manuscript, in the style of the most highly esteemed specimens. The first block-books, uniting the illustration with the description, were of course made by drawing on the wood-block the illustration, writing in reverse the description, and then cutting away the wood where not covered with the lines of manuscript and illustration. The custom of beautifying and illuminating manuscripts had prevailed from the remotest periods. The early Egyptian papyri give us abundant examples. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the art of illuminating manuscripts had been brought to very great perfection. The initial letters of chapters were frequently elaborate, and sometimes contained exquisitely colored miniatures of heads or of groups, flowers, arabesques, and quite often

grotesque designs. It naturally came to pass, that immediately after the invention of printing with moveable type, the idea of engraving ornamental initial letters to imitate the manuscripts was seized upon. Many of the early books were printed with blanks where the illuminator was expected to insert the initial letter, ornamented to suit the taste and wishes or the purse of the possessor of the volume. Other books were printed with ornamented initials, and the variety and beauty of these soon became very great. More taste and skill was exhibited by the early wood engravers in this work than in general illustration, and the improvement in the art of engraving these letters was more rapid and marked than in other departments of the art. It is frequently a matter of surprise, that the tasteful and careful printers of the day could see their books ornamented with such fine designs in the initials and be content with the coarse and rude works which for a long period served the purposes of general illustration.

A few specimens of ornaments of pages and initial

letters have been selected from works published about the time of Albert Durer, and used in this volume, not as exhibiting any history of progress in the art, but merely as affording a few examples, in absolute facsimile, of different styles of ornament of the period. Hundreds of other varieties might be given. Title pages to books were unknown until toward the close of the fifteenth century, when it began to become common to ornament the title page with wood-cut borders, and from this followed rapidly the plan of ornamenting other pages, by surrounding the type with borders. In all these styles of beautifying books the wood engravers seem to have had great success, as great indeed as has been achieved in later centuries. Perhaps it was owing to the fact that their designs were but copies of the existing illuminations of manuscripts which abounded in so much beauty; or it may have been due to the employment, in this department, of men accustomed to engraving type, who were in many instances goldsmiths, or workmen in gold and silver, and thus familiar with the art of exquisite chasing in metals.

Whatever the explanation, it is quite certain that wood engraving in general made little advance for a half century, except in the ornaments of the pages by initials and otherwise. The following cut, which is a fac-simile from the *Fasciculus Temporis*, published in 1477, will serve to show the general character of the illustration of that period, and the earliest style of wood engraving for books.

Data est michi omnis potestas in celo
et in terra Ite in orbem universum et predicate evange
lium omni creature Et ecce ego vobis/
cum sum vsq; ad consumacionem seculi.

This rude cut, it will be observed, is surrounded

by a legend, which was set up in moveable type, the whole being in the middle of a page in the volume. It affords a fair specimen of the style of figure engraving on wood of that date. The following cut from the same volume, a representation of a city, is an equally fair specimen of the architectural and landscape work of the time.

Between this time and the close of the century there were some wood engravers who improved much on the art. But none of them made any such striking advance as to impress their style on cotemporaneous work,

until the time of Durer. The *Nuremberg Chronicle*, published in 1493, contains an immense number of wood-cuts, exhibiting in general very little improved skill in design or execution, but here and there presenting a figure or group which seems to have come from the hand of a master. Perhaps no more fair specimen can be given of the best style in this celebrated book than the accompanying fac-simile of a picture of Noah.

Nevertheless there were, at this period, in all parts of Europe, men who were able to be masters in the art, and who seem only to have needed

the example and lead of such an one as Albert Durer. When they received this, the improvement was instantaneous. Within ten years the art was brought to a degree of perfection which is astonishing when we reflect on the long time during which it had languished. The world began to be filled with illustrated books. During the early part of the sixteenth century perhaps as large a proportion of the printed books were accompanied with illustrations as in any modern time. And the effective character of these illustrations will challenge comparison with productions of the art in later times.

The reader who is familiar with the history of wood engraving will pardon this detail, which is designed for those who have not had the opportunity of informing themselves on the subject. It seemed necessary, for such persons, to give this much of the history of the art, that they might obtain a correct view of the importance which attaches to the wood-cuts of Albert Durer.

UCH was the influence of Durer on cotemporary art, that although it is not to be claimed that he was the first wood engraver who deserves rank as a master, there is undeniable force in the claim that Durer was the first who sought how to make, and who succeeded in making the wood-block the medium of conveying to paper, impressions of drawings which, in spirit, tone and color, approximated to the art of painting, an art in which he was an acknowledged master. With his great success as an engraver on copper we have nothing to do in the present work. I have chosen to call Durer a wood-engraver. There has been much paper wasted in discussing the question whether he ever engraved his own blocks, or whether he drew the pictures on wood and left them to be cut by unknown workmen. The question is about as important as whether Canova or Crawford handled the chisel and hammer, and cut

his own statues from the marble block. It is certain that he drew on the wood-block and caused to be engraved a style of work unknown before, and there is no evidence to be found that he did not, if occasion required it, use the knife himself to finish choice lines, or to show the *formschneider* how best to execute the new style of engraving which was given him to do. It is evident from examination of existing blocks, that some of them were engraved by different workmen. It follows, that like modern artists on wood, he sometimes employed engravers to do his work. It is possible that he did nothing more than direct the work, lending such aid as he must necessarily do to carry out his designs. It is possible that he sometimes did his own engraving, but nothing can be affirmed with certainty on this point. If Thorwaldsen was a sculptor, Durer was a wood engraver.

LBERT DURER was born at Nuremberg, May 20, 1471. His father and his mother's father were goldsmiths. Goldsmiths in that day were practical engravers, and Durer worked at his father's trade until he was sixteen years old. Then, at the son's earnest request, his father placed him as a pupil with Michael Wolgemuth to learn the art of painting.

It is hardly probable that we shall ever know much about Wolgemuth. Some of the writers on wood engraving in Europe are given more to criticising and discrediting one another than to affording much aid to the seeker after definite truth. One asserts that Wolgemuth was an engraver on wood, and another denies it. One asserts that he engraved on copper, and another denies it. After reading a half dozen authors who have equal title to respect, the student in the nineteenth century may well begin to doubt whether Wolgemuth is not wholly a myth. We will not enter on the discussion, but accept the naked fact,

conceded by all, that Durer was his pupil, and that in the blaze of the scholar's fame the master's was darkened, so that he is nearly lost to history. Before the close of the century, Durer had become the great illustrator of his age.

His earliest wood-cuts with a date are a series of sixteen, known as the Apocalypse, and published at Nuremberg in 1498. He had previously published copperplate engravings, the first of which bearing a date is of 1494. These cuts of the Apocalypse are interesting as being the first of the improved age, the great forerunners of wood engravings as illustrations of exalted art. They gave a new impetus to illustrative work. Their effect is visible in the productions of co-temporary artists, and they may be looked on as forming the first of the long series of wood engravings which deserve rank with the finest products of the pencil or the burin.

In 1510, Durer published a series of eleven large wood engravings, entitled *Passio Domini nostri Jesu, &c.* This series is generally known as the Great Passion.

It was followed very shortly by the series of thirty-seven cuts which are given in the present volume, and which Durer himself called The Little Passion, *Die kleine Passion*, distinguishing it thus from the larger series of eleven.

The first issue of these cuts appears to have been without letterpress accompanying them. I am not aware of the existence at present of any complete copy of that edition, nor is it altogether certain that they were published as a book. Among the examples of Durer's works in my possession are twenty of this first issue, without the letterpress on the back. The first issue did not include the title page with the seated figure of Christ. The dates 1509, 1510, which are found on some of the cuts, fix the period of the work, and they may therefore be regarded as specimens of the artist's ability in the zenith of his fame. The second edition was published by Durer shortly after the first, and in this appeared the seated figure of Christ, while he also accompanied the cuts with Latin verses, by Chelidonius, printed on the backs of the engravings.

The wood-blocks seem to have been lost sight of after this for a hundred years, but in 1612 an edition was published by Basuccio in Venice, from the original blocks. It is said these had been purchased in the Netherlands.

In 1839, a part of the original blocks came into possession of the British Museum, by purchase, from the son of a deceased clergyman of England, who had bought them some years previously in Italy. In 1844 an edition was published in London. It was not printed directly from the blocks, which had become somewhat worm-eaten, and more or less worn and broken, but from stereotype casts taken from the blocks, and retouched and repaired by a distinguished wood engraver. It may thus be said, that four editions have been published substantially from the original blocks. Besides these however, the copies, reproductions and imitations of this series, or of portions of it, have been very numerous. During the lifetime of Durer, Marc Antonio, in Venice, published his remarkable fac-similes of them on copper, a reproduction which

excited the indignation of Durer. Hence is said to have arisen one of the earliest cases of copyright prosecution, when Durer sought justice from the Venetian authorities. Unhappily there is no existing report of the case, and it is even doubtful whether the whole story is not mythical.

Other artists copied Durer in his own day, and shortly after his death. Laurence Hopfer made some very close copies of a portion of this series, substituting his initials L. H. for the monogram of Durer.

But it was not in copying his works that artists most distinctly acknowledged the superiority of the master. It was rather in the immediate adoption of his instruction, which began to be visible from the time of his earliest publications, and increased rapidly to the period of his death. In any collection of wood-cuts, extending down to the year 1530, Durer seems to be the teacher to whom all others were looking, and toward whom they endeavored to approximate in style and effect. There had been great masters before him, and there were cotemporary artists who worked in

copperplate, who were the equals, and even the superiors of the Nuremberg illustrator. But in the art of wood engraving, in which, far more than in copper or steelplate engraving, the artist is enabled to throw his soul into the picture, and the world is subsequently able to read that soul, there had been no one to compare with him. Before his day a wood engraving had been the picture of one simple idea, but Durer made it a poem, even an epic.

Durer died in 1528. His fame and his influence on art survived and increased from year to year. Many of the strongest effects produced by wood engraving, even in our own day, are due to a careful study and close following of the example of the great German master, and a return to his bold and vigorous style from the comparatively effeminate manner of a portion of the modern school.

ERTAINLY it would be folly to attempt an analysis of the merits of the drawings of Durer herewith presented to the reader. If they do not repay a studious examination no aid would be derived from any letterpress assistance. One remark on this subject seems all sufficient. It is not often that the eye rests on a wood-cut which produces a lasting impression on the mind. But however rude or even grotesque the work of Durer may seem, it is hardly possible to look at one of these cuts and turn away to forget it. The strong lines of the artist imprint their ideas on the mind of the beholder, who will hardly be able to forget any one of the figures, or to lose the emotional effect of the group. There is a union of the most profound tenderness of expression with a bold and free treatment of the subjects which has never been surpassed, if ever equalled by any artist on wood or metal. I think that in the kneeling figure of the Virgin parting with her Son and Lord, (No. 6,)

there is as much emotion, love, reverence and grief combined, as in any existing work however elaborate. Yet of the person of the mother there is visible nothing more than her clasped and uplifted hands and a dark dim outline of a clouded face.

# THE LITTLE PASSION.


I. Title page of the second edition.
—Christ mourning over the sins of man.

II. The Fall of man.—Adam and Eve receiving the apple.

III. The Curse.—Adam and Eve expelled from Eden.

IV. The Annunciation.

V. The Nativity.

VI. Christ taking leave of his mother Mary.

VII. Christ entering Jerusalem in triumph.

VIII. Christ scourging the money changers from the Temple.

IX. The Last Supper.

X. Christ washing the feet of the disciples.

XI. The Agony in the garden.

XII. The Betrayal by Judas.

XIII. Christ brought before the high priest.

XIV. Christ blindfolded and buffeted.

XV. Christ conducted to Pilate.

XVI. Christ dragged before Herod.

XVII. Christ brought again before Pilate.

XVIII. The Flagellation.

XIX. Christ crowned with thorns.

XX. Ecce Homo.—Christ exhibited to the people.

XXI. Christ led away—Pilate washing his hands.

XXII. Christ falling under the Cross.

XXIII. St. Veronica with the sudarium, between Peter and Paul.

XXIV. Christ nailed to the Cross.

XXV. The Crucifixion.

XXVI. Christ in Hades.

XXVII. The Descent from the Cross.

XXVIII. The Mourning of the Holy Women over the dead Christ.

XXIX. The Entombment.

XXX. The Resurrection.

XXXI. Christ appearing to his mother Mary.

XXXII. Christ appearing to Mary Magdalen in the garden.

XXXIII. The Supper at Emmaus.

XXXIV. The Incredulity of Thomas.

XXXV. The Ascension.

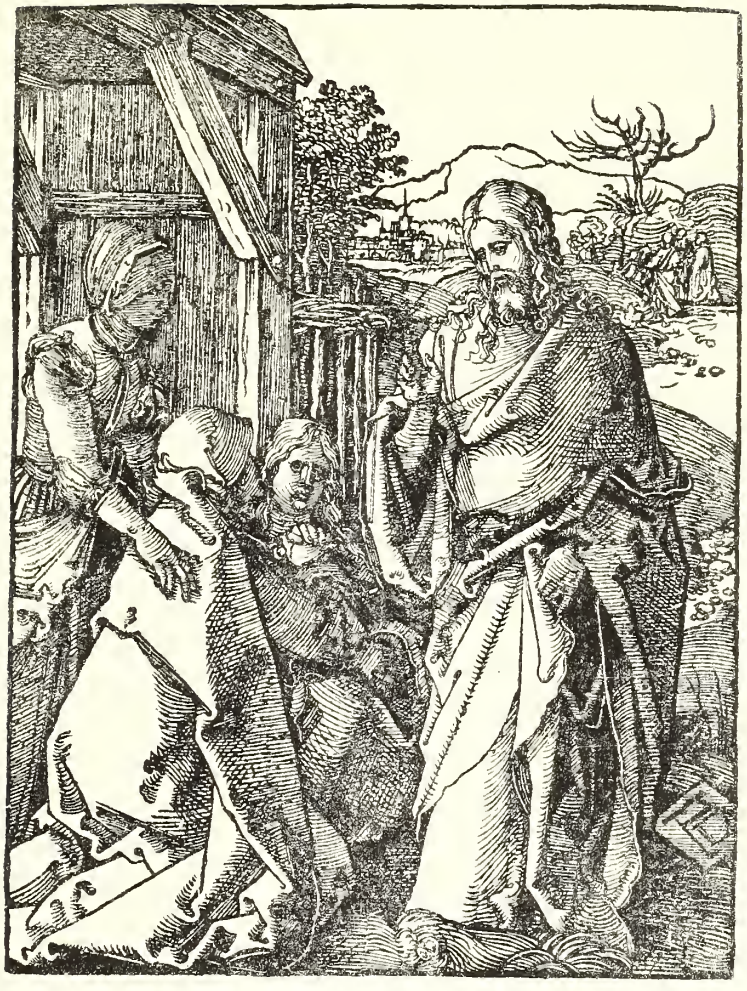
XXXIV. The Descent of the Holy Ghost.

XXXVII. The Judgment of all men.

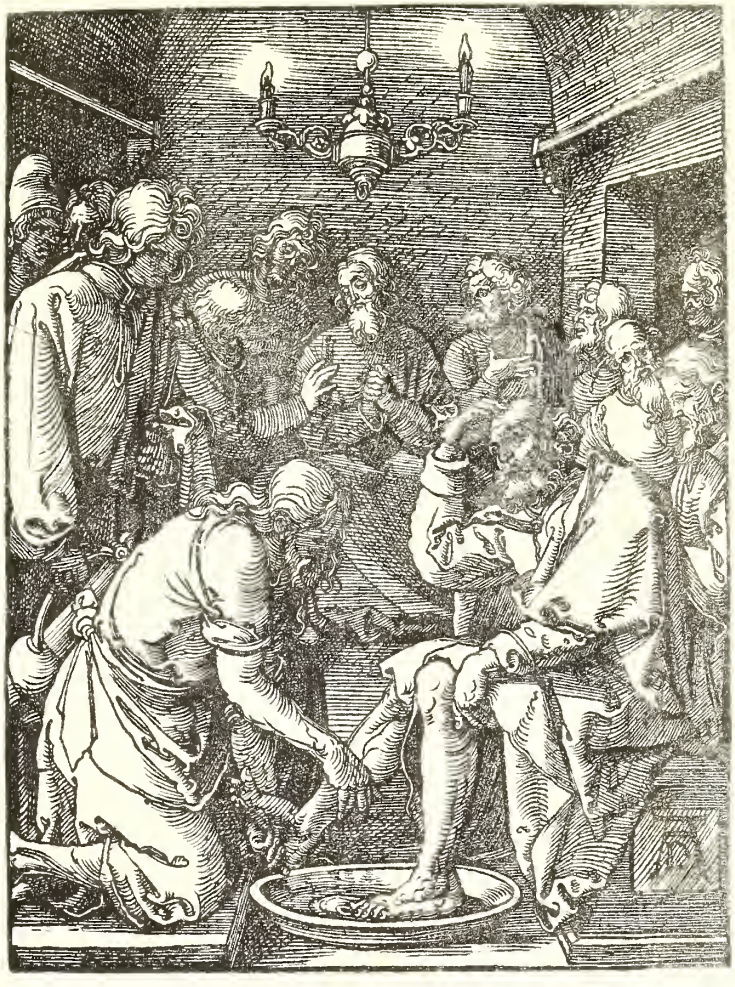
# Paſſio Chriſti ab Alberto Durer Au
renbergenſi effigiata cũ varij generis carmi
nibus Fratris Benedicti Chelidonij
Muſophili.

O mihi tantorum iuſto mihi caula dolorum
O crucis O mortis cauſa cruenta mihi.
O homo fat fuerit tibi me ſemel iſta tuliſſe,
O ceſſa culpis me cruciare nouis.

1510



VI.



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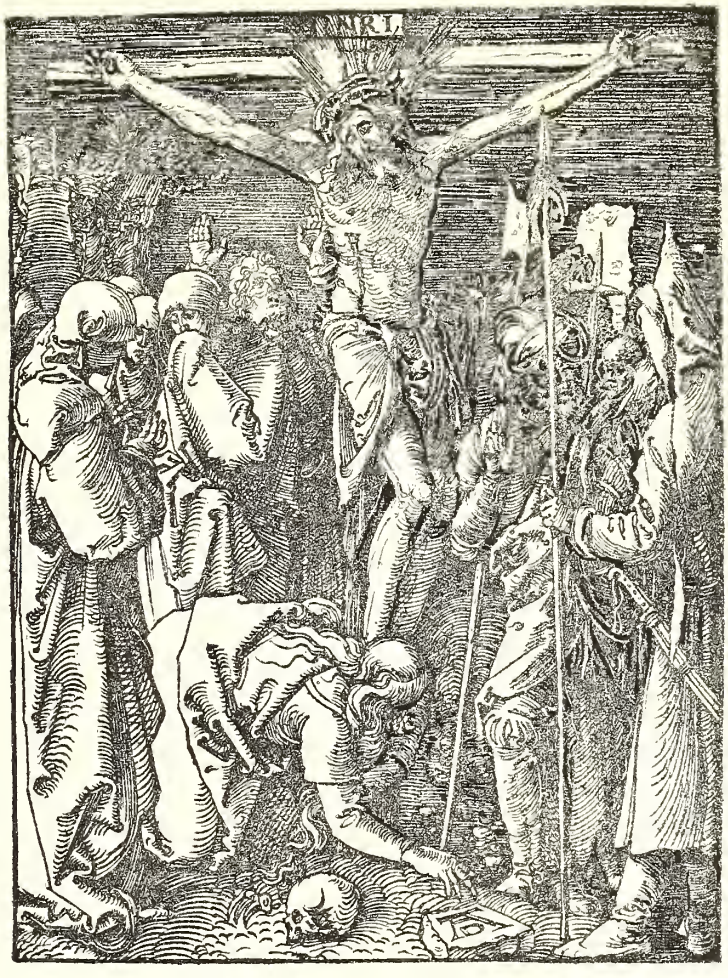
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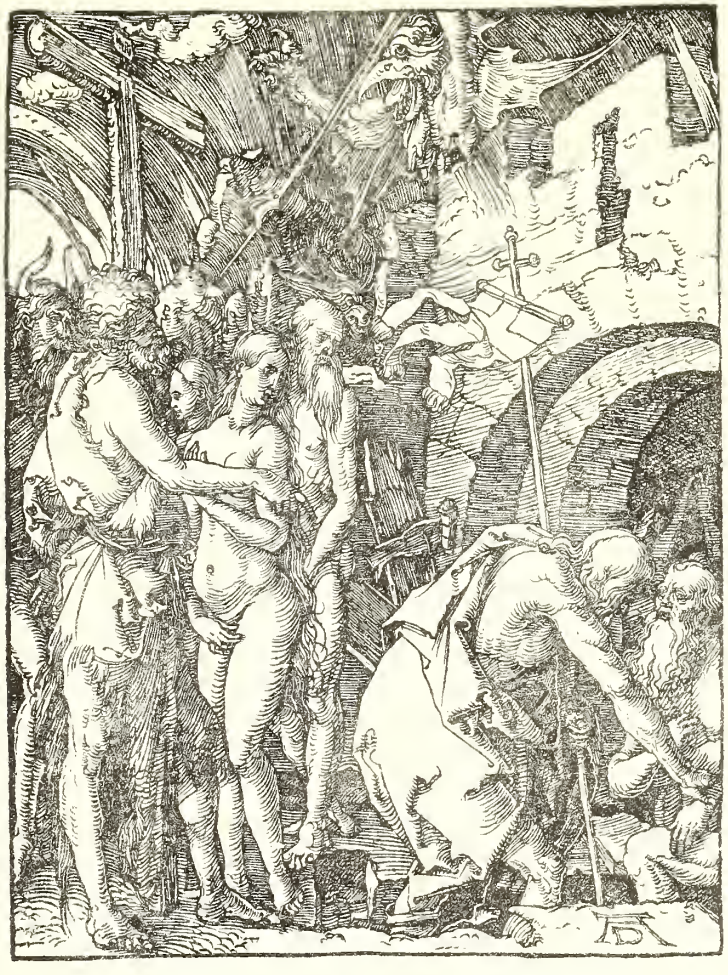

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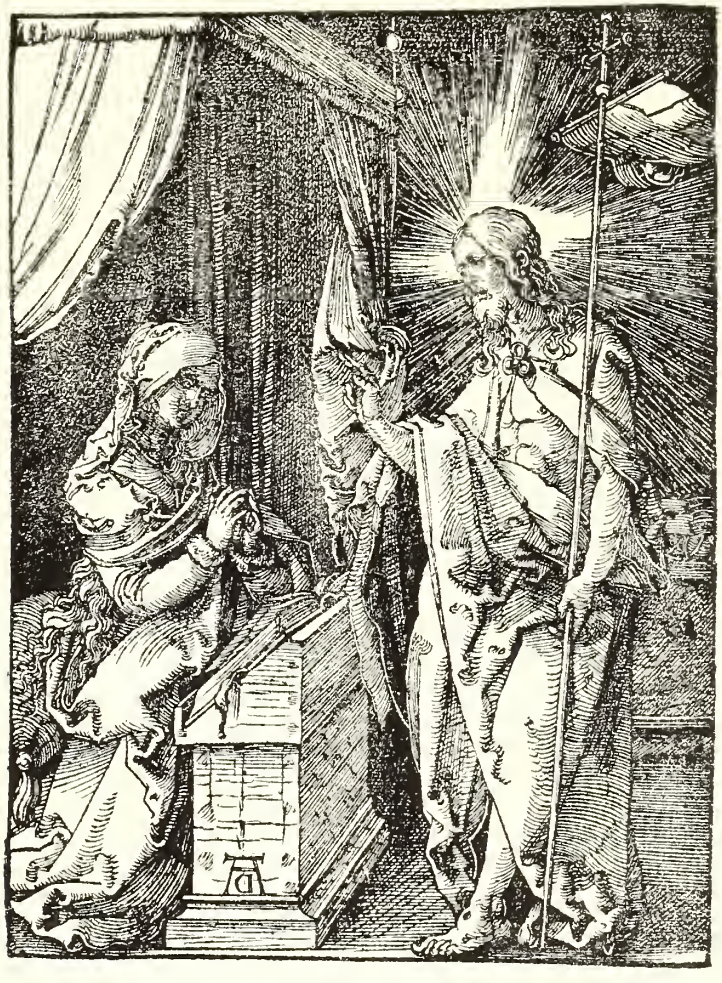

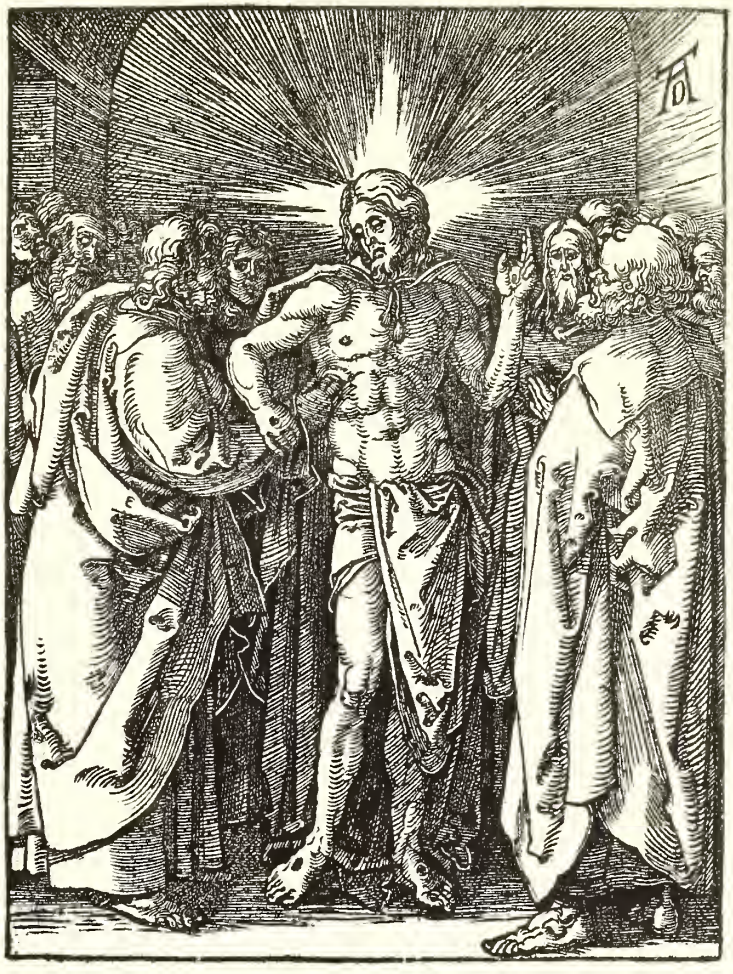

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